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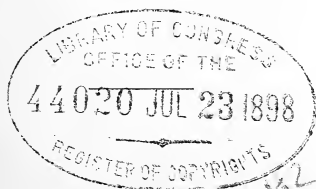
A
MODERN OTHELLO

A Farce-Comedy in One Act

Adapted from the French of Brisbarre and Marc-Michel

By ✓

Walter E. Hoffmann



Philadelphia

The Penn Publishing Company

1898

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A MODERN OTHELLO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RAPHAEL PARTRIDGE,	<i>A Modern Othello</i>
BERTHA,	<i>His Wife</i>
HARRY STAGGINS,	<i>A Nice Young Man</i>
NANCY,	<i>A Servant-Girl</i>

TIME OF REPRESENTATION: One hour and a half

COSTUMES

PARTRIDGE. Age 35. Black mustache, side whiskers, and hair; dressing sack and slippers. Change to business suit, coat and hat.

STAGGINS. Age 28. Blonde curly hair and mustache; walking suit.

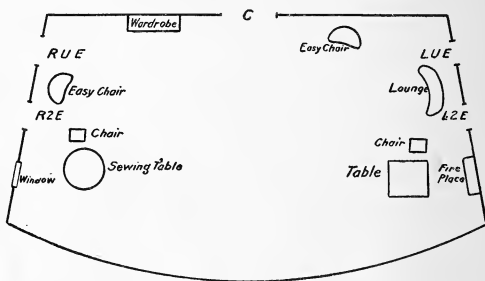
BERTHA. Age 25. Pretty morning wrapper. Change to street costume.

NANCY. Age 25. Maid's costume, with cap.

PROPERTIES

Two pistols, hat, coat, valise, and bit of ice on plate for PARTRIDGE, also window glass in window for PARTRIDGE to break. Two canes, letter, old hat to "smash," and shoes for STAGGINS. Work basket with ball of worsted wound on a piece of paper on table, small pitcher of milk and glass and smelling salts for BERTHA. Dust cloth and skimmer for NANCY. Embroidery work in table drawer.

SCENE PLOT



SCENE.—Nicely furnished parlor, boxed, set in 4th G. Entrances: C., to hall; R. U. E., to kitchen; R. 2 E., to Partridge's room; L. U. E., to back stairs; L. 2 E., to Bertha's room. Window, R. 1 E. Fireplace, L. 1 E. Wardrobe, up R. Tables and chairs about room. Lounge, L., with tiger-skin rug in front of it.

A MODERN OTHELLO

SCENE.—*Parlor in PARTRIDGE's house. For description see scene plot. When curtain rises NANCY is dusting the furniture down L.*

BERTHA. (*in morning dress, coming out of her room, L.*
2 E.) Where is my husband?

NANCY. He's shaving himself—he's just got up!

BERTHA. At ten o'clock? So late?

NANCY. Well, if you roam about all the night long, instead of sleeping—

BERTHA. Roam about? My husband?

NANCY. Yes—he sneaks about the whole house—sword in hand—

BERTHA. Sword in hand? At night?

NANCY. Yes, with our big kitchen-knife! First, he listened at your door—

BERTHA. Heavens! And then?

NANCY. At the hall door, the back stairs; in fact at every place where there possibly might be anything to overhear—only not at my door! Then he pulled the curtain back from the window and looked into the street. After a while he returned to his room and sighed, sighed, as if his heart was breaking.

BERTHA. That's very strange—

NANCY. Ah! when his first wife was living yet, he acted precisely the same way.

BERTHA. Did he?

NANCY. The milkman told me so, therefore it must be true. He always carried pistols in his pockets—

BERTHA. Why?

NANCY. Why? Because he is jealous.

BERTHA. Is it possible? I have not noticed it as yet.

NANCY. You passed the first three months after your wedding with your aunt in the country. There he had no chances for jealousy, but here in New York it is quite different.

BERTHA. It is true, my husband told me his first wife made his life miserable.

NANCY. It is so—the grocer's boy told me.

BERTHA. Oh! it is awful! How can a wife deceive her husband?

NANCY. I don't know yet. When I am married I will let you know.

BERTHA. He has no reason at all to be jealous! We never take a walk, because he is afraid it will make me tired—

NANCY. He's afraid that somebody might follow you.

BERTHA. I always wear a veil, because he's afraid the dust will hurt my eyes.

NANCY. He's afraid that somebody might see you.

BERTHA. What nonsense you talk! My husband is so good—he only thinks of pleasing me (*sitting down R. front, taking some fancy needlework out of the drawer of the sewing-table*), and it is my task to make him happy whenever I can!

NANCY. (*who has been dusting all the time, looking at the needlework*) What a pretty design!

BERTHA. It is for a skull-cap I want to surprise him with!

NANCY. How lovely! When I have a husband, I, too, shall put something nice on his head! (*Continues dusting.*)

(PARTRIDGE *enters noiselessly from R. 2 E., listens, then speaks aside.*)

PARTRIDGE. What may they have to whisper about?

NANCY. (*looking backwards, beholds PARTRIDGE, cries aloud*) Ah!

BERTHA. (*hastily concealing the needlework in the drawer.*) My husband!

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) They are confused!

BERTHA. (*going to meet him*) Good-morning, Raphael!

PARTRIDGE. (*smiling, always looking at the drawer*) Good-morning, darling! What did you—

BERTHA. (*interrupting him*) Did you sleep well?

PARTRIDGE. Yes—did you?

BERTHA. (*as before*) You look a little pale!

PARTRIDGE. I am quite well! (*going to the sewing-table*) What did you conceal there?

BERTHA. (*quickly*) Oh, nothing—nothing—

PARTRIDGE (*walking toward table*) Yes, you did!

BERTHA. Don't open it!

PARTRIDGE. I am very inquisitive—it is almost my sole defect—

BERTHA. (*tries to keep him back*) I pray you—

PARTRIDGE. (*opening drawer*) A skull-cap! A gentleman's house-cap! For whom is it, Mrs. Partridge?

BERTHA. For whom should it be? It is for you, Mr. Partridge!

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) What a fool I am! (*aloud, turning his cheek toward her*). Hit me, Bertha; hit me hard—I deserve it.

BERTHA. Oh, the handsome embroidery is entirely mussed up, you wicked man! (*Goes to the table and brings the embroidery and wool carefully in order before putting them away.*)

PARTRIDGE (*aside*) I thought she had deceived me like my first wife. One day I find a portfolio. "Stop!" cries the cheat, "don't open it—it is a surprise for you!" But I did open it, and found—the picture of a fine young gentleman! It was not a jolly surprise, indeed!

BERTHA. (*comes back to him*) What did you say, my dear?

PARTRIDGE. (*looking out of the window, aside*) I knew it—there he is again—the rascal!

BERTHA. Something interesting to see there? (*Walks up to him.*)

PARTRIDGE. The beautiful clouds! But tell me, darling, how do you pass away the time when I am out? Do you look out of the window sometimes to get fresh air?

BERTHA. No, only to see you coming!

PARTRIDGE. How kind you are! For no other purpose?

BERTHA. What else should it be for?

PARTRIDGE. I don't know myself! But can you tell me who the young fellow on the other side of the street is who hangs out of his window all day long?

BERTHA. A young fellow?

PARTRIDGE. (*pointing through the opening of the curtains*) This one—there—opposite us?

BERTHA. Yes, now I see—I did not notice him before!

PARTRIDGE. Pshaw!

BERTHA. I see him for the first time—

PARTRIDGE. Really? (*aside*) Does she tell the truth? (*aloud*) What a beautiful curly head!

BERTHA. Do you think so?

PARTRIDGE. Maybe he is a hairdresser!

BERTHA. Do you want him to fix your head?

PARTRIDGE. (*angry*) Heaven forbid! Nobody shall do that—(*quieting down again*) But why is this idler, day and night—

NANCY. (*aside to BERTHA*) Do you hear? At night!

PARTRIDGE.—at his window? He's smoking, reading, gaping, and continually busying himself with his two carnation-pots!

BERTHA. I did not know anything about all this. However, it seems so natural—

PARTRIDGE. Natural!—You are a child! Don't you comprehend, that this friend of flowers knows the language of flowers, too?

BERTHA. The language of flowers?

PARTRIDGE. Certainly, and—he has cast an eye on you!

BERTHA. What a queer idea!

PARTRIDGE. (*walking toward the window*) Here's the proof—he already looks over here again—

NANCY. (*aside*) The milkman is right, as I told her before! (*Exit R. U. E.*)

(BERTHA *seats herself* L. F.)

PARTRIDGE. (*always looking through the window*) Nice—really nice! Now he's watering his flowers,—h'm, it's getting better every day! Now he's smoking—blowing ringlets—he closes the window and draws the left part of the curtains forward. Why the *left* part—why not the right one?

BERTHA. I don't understand you!

PARTRIDGE. (*crying aloud*) Ha!

BERTHA. What is it?

PARTRIDGE. Now I have got it—it is clear! (*aside*) "Physiology of Matrimony," page 52—oh, I have not studied Balzac's treatise in vain. (*aloud*) Yes, it is as clear as daylight!

BERTHA. What?

PARTRIDGE. The declaration of love!

BERTHA. Made to me?

PARTRIDGE. Yes, to you!—Listen! The flower pot signifies: my beloved one! That is clear, is it not, eh?

BERTHA. Does it mean that?

PARTRIDGE. The left part of the curtains,—mark me well, the left part: my heart,—the lighted cigar: burns,—the ringlets: with love. My beloved one, my heart burns with love!

BERTHA. Oh, that is awful—and I had no idea of it—how good that you draw my attention to it—I never shall go near the window again!

PARTRIDGE. (*delighted*) Ah, that is balsam on my wound!

BERTHA. You will confide in me?

PARTRIDGE. Certainly—certainly! (*aside*) I should have the window mured up—but my wife will scarcely consent

to it. Well, best rent another flat! (*to BERTHA*) Now I have to go to my tailor's, my dear—I shall be back very soon! (*Kissing her forehead.*)

BERTHA. Do not stay away too long, dear. Meanwhile I shall dress for luncheon.

(*Exit L. 2 E.*)

PARTRIDGE. (*walks toward the door at back, but changes his mind and returns*) I consider her true and virtuous, but—my first wife was so, too, until—she cheated me. Yes—I will move—I'll look out for a cozy flat—with windows toward the garden or the back-yard. (*Has meanwhile mechanically examined the contents of the small work-basket on the sewing-table and takes up a ball of worsted, which he contemplates eagerly*) H'm! That has been wound up on paper. What kind of paper may it be? Ha! Perhaps a letter, a poem—but—I trust in her! (*He sits down and unwinds the worsted*) How would it be if I would make Nancy my confidant! (*calling*) Nancy! Perhaps I may derive some profit from this innocent country lass!

NANCY. (*enters R. U. E., a large skimmer in hand, her arms bare*) Did you call me?

PARTRIDGE. My child, I took you from your village to live with us because nowadays truth is only to be found among lettuce, hot-beds, and cornstalks! Please tell me, wouldn't you like to make some extra money to save up for a rainy day?

NANCY. Extra money, besides my wages? Well, that would not be bad! But what do you want me to do?

PARTRIDGE. Only very little. (*pointing out of window*) Do you see that pomadized curly-head over there? Do not lose sight of him for a second, and report exactly all his movements—

NANCY. But—

PARTRIDGE. (*rising*) Hush! (*dramatically*) One eye on him—the other on my wife, whose steps you have to watch also! Then you will tell me minutely all you have seen—

NANCY. But—

PARTRIDGE. Hush! Remember the extra money for a rainy day! (*Sitting down and continuing to unwind the ball of worsted.*)

NANCY. (*looking at him, aside*) What's he doing now?

PARTRIDGE. (*has completely unwound the worsted, rising*) Ah! the paper—what may it contain? (*Unfolding it hastily, reading*) Mrs. Gladstone's recipe for home-made mince pies. (*Aside, throwing the paper away*) Nothing—nothing!

NANCY. (*aside*) Such a husband wouldn't suit me.

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) I hope to be more fortunate the next time. (*Aloud*) Now, my innocent country-bud, take your seat here (*pressing her into the chair near the window*) and begin your glorious duty.

NANCY. Yes, but my milk is boiling over.

PARTRIDGE. Be still! (*Aside*) I have won her. (*About to leave, turns once more to NANCY. With importance*) Remember the extra money for a rainy day.

(*Exit c. in flat.*)

NANCY. (*rising*) What does he take me for? I never shall betray my mistress. (*Calling*) Madame! Madame!

BERTHA. (*enters L. 2 E. with a letter*) Ah! it is you, Nancy! (*Aside*) It must be—my peace and his, too, depend on it.

NANCY. Only think, madame, Mr. Partridge wants me to act the part of a detective on you—

BERTHA. What?

NANCY. Yes; and as a reward he promised me some extra money besides my wages for a rainy day.

BERTHA. I pity him. How can he cause so much trouble for himself without any reason? By-the-by, Nancy, do what he told you. Tell him all I do; that will be the best remedy to cure him and to convince him of the groundlessness of his apprehensions. Do tell him all—all—but don't mention the errand I now want to send you on.

NANCY. Oh!

BERTHA. Silence! Carry this letter at once to the gentleman across the street.

NANCY. But—

BERTHA. Be still! Hurry up!

NANCY. But how—

BERTHA. Hush! Return immediately.

NANCY. (*aside*) That's very strange. But I surely will not tell Mr. Partridge of it.

(*Exit c. in flat.*)

BERTHA. I hope when the young gentleman has read my letter— Strange! I have had no idea of his existence! For my sake he could have smoked, drawn his curtains, and changed the places of his carnation-pots as long as he liked! I wouldn't have found any danger for me in it! But now it is different, and therefore my letter will put an end to his strange actions. The young man will understand that he must give up his intentions—

NANCY. (*Comes hastily in c., in flat, excited.*) Madame! he's coming! he's coming!

BERTHA. Who's coming?

NANCY. The young gentleman from across the street!

BERTHA. Is it possible?

NANCY. When he had read your letter, he exclaimed: "What does this mean? I want an explanation. What kind of a joke is this intended for?"

BERTHA. A joke!

NANCY. He will be here at once (*walks towards the centre door*).

BERTHA. Send him away! Tell him I am out—and cannot give any further explanations! (*Running off, R. 2 E.*)

(HARRY STAGGINS *appearing c., in flat. He carries a walking-stick.*)

STAGGINS. My little country lass! Here I am! (*entering*) Please tell your mistress—

NANCY. Has been done already! She says she is out!

STAGGINS. Is she? Well, then, I shall wait for her!

NANCY. What? You want to stay here?

STAGGINS. If necessary, until to-morrow morning!

NANCY. Such an idea!

STAGGINS. (*sitting down, R. front.*) Well, I don't leave before the puzzle has been solved.

NANCY. But—

STAGGINS. Go, call your mistress!

NANCY. She is not in.

STAGGINS. Nonsense! Call her!

NANCY. Well, I go! (*aside*) If Mr. Partridge would come home now, heavens! (*Exit L. 2 E.*)

STAGGINS: (*rising, puts his hat on the table and leans his cane against the chair*) I do not move from this place until I know what this odd letter means; it is not All-Fool's Day to-day! (*reading*) "Sir! I request of you to discontinue your telegraphic signals. They insult and compromise me! I do not need to put my name to this letter; you know who sends it!" (*Speaking*). I know nothing, nothing at all.

(BERTHA and NANCY *appear L. 2 E.*)

NANCY. (*whispering to BERTHA*) You see, he wants to stay here!

BERTHA. (*to NANCY*) That's too bad! (*Aloud*) Sir!

STAGGINS. (*bowing*) Madame! (*Aside*) Ah, how beautiful she is!

BERTHA. (*to* NANCY) Keep near at hand! (*NANCY goes off*
R. U. E.)

BERTHA. (*to* STAGGINS) I am surprised, sir!

STAGGINS. Excuse me, but concerning surprises, there seems to be my turn first! You have sent me a very mysterious letter, and—

BERTHA. I think my letter is very plain, Mister—Mister—

STAGGINS. My name is Harry Staggs! But will you not please explain—

BERTHA. Well, sir, if you need an explanation yet, let me tell you, your behavior is to the utmost degree—unbecoming! By it you keep me a prisoner in my own rooms and prevent me appearing at my window!

STAGGINS. (*aside*) Oh, I have offended her? (*Aloud*) I have neglected to draw my curtains to.

BERTHA. On the contrary, you draw too much on them!

STAGGINS. (*startled*) Oh!

BERTHA. Especially on the left part of them.

STAGGINS. (*aside*) Behind which I'm dressing—very good, indeed!

BERTHA. Besides this you pass the whole day on your window—

STAGGINS. To get fresh air—

BERTHA. Only to get fresh air?

STAGGINS. (*aside*) Why else should I do it?

BERTHA. (*continuing*) You smoke—you constantly change the positions of your flower-pots—

STAGGINS. Dear me! The flowers want shadow, when the sun comes out—(*aside*) Is this lady perhaps a little disordered (*touching his forehead*) here? (*aloud*) I assure you, madame—

BERTHA. Do not attempt to deny it, sir! In fact, your actions are offensive to me, and I beg you to stop them.

STAGGINS. Offensive? What do you take my smoking cigars, my curtains and flower-pots for, I should like to know?

BERTHA. Oh! that's plain enough—for a silent declaration of love.

STAGGINS. What? A declaration of love? By me? To you? (*aside*) It seems indeed as if—(*repeats the movement to his forehead*) (*Aloud*) But, who could talk such nonsense into your head?

BERTHA. My husband.

STAGGINS. Your husband? Let me tell you again, he is mistaken—

BERTHA. Well?

STAGGINS. I had no idea of your existence until now.

BERTHA. Truly?

STAGGINS. I never noticed you before.

BERTHA. Is that really so?

STAGGINS. It is only that I have not been fortunate enough to see you before. (*aside*) She's charming! (*aloud*) Besides that, I am about starting in business for myself to get married—that means, getting married, to start in business for myself—

BERTHA. You are to be married?

STAGGINS. Yes; to a widow—her late husband dealt in walking canes. My bride to be went out of town and I expect her back every minute—

BERTHA. I am puzzled, sir—excuse me—don't be angry with me—

STAGGINS. Angry? On the contrary, I am really sorry that my window—

BERTHA. Please, sir—

STAGGINS. But people in my condition have no choice. If you have no means, there is no other means than marrying a rich widow of certain means! But my widow is well preserved—wonderfully well preserved for her years! She only has one fault—a very violent temper!

BERTHA. Has she?

STAGGINS. And she is jealous—like a tigress!

BERTHA. Poor man! I can imagine what you have to suffer. My husband, too, is jealous—jealous as Othello!

STAGGINS. I pity you! Only think of this—my widow has a special notion of making me presents of—walking-sticks! I am already the owner of eighteen canes!

BERTHA. (*laughing*) Ha! ha! Eighteen walking-sticks!

STAGGINS. She counts them over every day. If one should be missing, my widow and the previously mentioned "means" would be lost to me forever!

BERTHA. I hope you will forget my foolish letter—

STAGGINS. (*courteously*) Never! It procured me the honor of your acquaintance! May I sometimes call on you to see how you are?

BERTHA. That's impossible, sir! My husband is so jealous—

STAGGINS. I can find that only natural, such a charming lady as you—

BERTHA. Please—no flatteries! Will you promise me to look out of your window not quite so frequently?

STAGGINS. I'll nail the shutters shut!

BERTHA. To let your flower-pots alone—

STAGGINS. I'll put them under my bed.

BERTHA. And to assume that we never have met?

STAGGINS. That will be very hard for me, but to please you—

BERTHA. You are very obliging, sir. (*Aside*) He's a nice young man.

STAGGINS. (*looking at her in admiration, aside*) What a beautiful woman she is.

NANCY. (*through the centre door, whispers*) Mr. Partridge is coming.

BERTHA. Heavens! My husband.

STAGGINS. (*taking his hat, saluting her*) Madame.

BERTHA. Please, sir, take the back stairs.

STAGGINS. I would go over the roof to accommodate you.

(NANCY and STAGGINS *exeunt* L. U. E., STAGGINS *leaving cane*.)

BERTHA. This young man is indeed very obliging, and so original, too. How Raphael could believe he loves me! (*Sitting down* L.)

PARTRIDGE. (*enters c. in flat, aside*) I have not yet found a suitable flat.

NANCY. (*returning from* L. U. E., *approaches* BERTHA, *not noticing* PARTRIDGE) He is gone.

PARTRIDGE. (*quickly*) Who is gone?

BERTHA and NANCY. Oh!

BERTHA. (*going to meet* PARTRIDGE) Let me tell you.

PARTRIDGE. (*furiously*) Gone? Who's gone? I want to know! He; that means a male person; a young man; a lover.

BERTHA. My dear—

PARTRIDGE. (*shouting and stamping the ground with his feet*) He! Who? Who is he?

BERTHA. (*aside*) What excitement. I will tell him.

PARTRIDGE. He! Who?

NANCY. (*decidedly*) The iceman.

PARTRIDGE. The iceman? Let us see. (*Runs off* R. U. E.)

BERTHA. Why did you tell him a lie, Nancy?

NANCY. Who does not want to hear the truth must accept a lie; and then, too, his rage frightens me—I am so timid.

(PARTRIDGE *returns* R. U. E., *with a small piece of ice on a plate*.)

PARTRIDGE. This is all the ice in the house.

NANCY. But—

BERTHA. Keep quiet, Nancy!

PARTRIDGE. No; do not keep quiet, Nancy! Speak, innocent country bud!

NANCY. Our ice-box was empty, and hearing an iceman crying out his "Ice! Ice!" in the street, I ran downstairs, but he was gone already, and therefore I said to Mrs. Partridge: "He is gone!"

PARTRIDGE. (*to BERTHA*) Speak the truth! Why didn't you tell me so at once, darling?

BERTHA. You didn't give me the time (*aside*) to invent an excuse!

PARTRIDGE. Your tarrying and confusion could make me jealous—me, your husband, full of confidence in you!

BERTHA (*aside*) He, and confident!

PARTRIDGE (*near the window, aside*) What's this? No more signals? No flower-pots? Nothing? What does this mean? What signal may the absence of any signal indicate?

BERTHA. (*aside*) Gracious—the young man left his cane! (*Takes it and hides it behind herself.*)

PARTRIDGE. (*in turning, notices this; quickly, to BERTHA*) What are you hiding there?

BERTHA. Oh, nothing!

NANCY. (*whispering to BERTHA*) Hand it to me! (*Hides the cane behind herself, and is about to pass out, humming a popular song.*)

BERTHA. (*to PARTRIDGE*) Nothing—do you see it now! (*showing her hands.*)

PARTRIDGE (*angrily to NANCY*) Halt! And you—what have you got there?

NANCY. Nothing!

PARTRIDGE. Let me see your hands!—The other one—the other one—both at the same time!

(*She has hidden the cane behind herself, and when showing him both hands. PARTRIDGE draws her one step forward, and the cane drops to the ground. He takes it up.*)

Ha! What's this?

NANCY. (*trembling*) A—a stick!

PARTRIDGE. (*furiously*) A Spanish cane!

BERTHA. Let me tell you—

PARTRIDGE. (*furiously*) Do you want to persuade me that this cane belongs to the iceman, who has not been here at all?

BERTHA. Listen quietly—

PARTRIDGE. (*in highest fury*) Quietly! I am quiet! Quite quiet!

BERTHA. This cane—

NANCY. Yes, this cane—

BERTHA. (*to NANCY*) Be silent!

PARTRIDGE. No, be not silent! Nancy will speak! She is the goddess of truth! Now?

NANCY. Well, this cane—

PARTRIDGE. Speak, speak!

NANCY. Is a surprise for you!

BERTHA. (*aside*) The young man's cane! If he should reclaim it?

PARTRIDGE. (*confused*) A surprise for me? What a big fool I am!

NANCY. Surely.

PARTRIDGE. (*to NANCY*) Keep your thoughts for yourself! (*to BERTHA, turning his cheek toward her*) Hit me, Bertha, hit me hard—I deserve it!

BERTHA. You wicked man! Will you now confide in me?

PARTRIDGE. Always—evermore! (*aside, looking at the cane*) Strange! The cane is not a new one!

STAGGINS. (*entering c. in flat*) I have forgotten to take my cane with me, and my widow—

BERTHA and NANCY. Heavens!

PARTRIDGE. What now!

STAGGINS. (*aside*) Thunders! That is the husband—the bloodthirsty Othello!

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) The curly-head.

BERTHA. (*to STAGGINS*) Not a word!

NANCY. (*to STAGGINS*) Be silent!

STAGGINS. (*aside*) How is this? He has my stick!

PARTRIDGE. (*very politely*) Please come in, sir. Be seated.

STAGGINS. You are very kind. (*aside*) These features! He really looks worse than Othello.

NANCY. (*aside*) Now the fun commences.

BERTHA. (*aside*) What will happen?

PARTRIDGE. (*aside, touching his pockets*) I have got my pistols, that's sufficient.

STAGGINS. (*aside*) That man frightens me—

PARTRIDGE. (*very politely*) What can I do for you, sir? You wish—

STAGGINS. Yes, that's it. I wish—

NANCY. (*aside to STAGGINS*) Not a word about your stick.

PARTRIDGE. You wish—

STAGGINS. To speak to you.

PARTRIDGE. Very well, what is it?

STAGGINS. I—I—I—

PARTRIDGE. Continue. What more?

STAGGINS. Oh, I see; you are busy—I trouble you. I shall call again (*about leaving*).

PARTRIDGE. (*retaining him*) No, no; remain, please! You do not trouble me at all! Speak; I am ready to hear you!

STAGGINS. Sir!

PARTRIDGE. Sir?

BERTHA. (*aside*) What tortures! (*quickly, aside to STAGGINS*) Tell him anything you like.

NANCY. (*on the other side of him*) Not a word.

STAGGINS. (*confused*) How?

PARTRIDGE. Perhaps you wish—

STAGGINS. It is so!

PARTRIDGE. To see me on private matters.

STAGGINS. Yes, sir; exactly so! (*aside*) The situation gets tangled up more yet. I don't know how to save myself.

PARTRIDGE. (*having meanwhile privately spoken to BERTHA and NANCY*) Well, you'll leave us alone—

BERTHA. But—

NANCY. (*aside to STAGGINS*) Be careful! He is a regular tiger! (*Exit with BERTHA, L. 2 E.*)

STAGGINS. (*aside*) A tiger! She herself told me he is an Othello! (*approaching the door*) I guess I need some fresh air.

PARTRIDGE. (*dragging him back by his coat tails*) Where to, my dear sir?

STAGGINS. I—I have to buy a tooth brush.

PARTRIDGE. Delay this important business for a little while yet. We are all by ourselves—you may speak undisturbed—

STAGGINS. Undisturbed—I am sorry!

PARTRIDGE. Take a seat, sir! (*Seating himself, holding the stick before himself.*)

STAGGINS. (*seating himself near him, aside*) What shall I tell him? (*aloud, putting his hand upon the stick*) My—

PARTRIDGE. (*putting his hand upon STAGGINS' hand*) No, mine—

STAGGINS. (*putting his hand upon PARTRIDGE's hand*) No, mine—

PARTRIDGE. (*putting his hand upon STAGGINS' hand*) Mine—

STAGGINS. It is for me, to explain, that—

PARTRIDGE. Go on, explain—

STAGGINS. Is it not obtrusive—if I—if I venture to put a confidential question—a question—relating to your private life? How long have you lived here in this house?

PARTRIDGE. About five years.

STAGGINS. (*rising*) Then you cannot give me the information I wish.

PARTRIDGE. (*pressing him back into his chair*) Perhaps I can—what do you want to know?

STAGGINS. (*stammering*) Whether—whether the stoves are smoking?

PARTRIDGE. Really? Are you perhaps a chimney-sweeper?

STAGGINS. Sir!

PARTRIDGE. Well, haven't you been an iceman before?

STAGGINS. An iceman! (*with pride*) Excuse me, sir; I am a licensed drug clerk, and want to rent a flat in this house.

PARTRIDGE. Ah! that's splendid! (*aside*) The rascal. Now, I understand all! He has been here—not the iceman; that is his cane—he shall have it! (*Taking good hold of the stick.*)

STAGGINS. (*frightened, aside*) What is he going to do, now?

PARTRIDGE. I want to give you some more explanations. You lovely curly-head, you! (*Touching his hair, raising the cane.*)

STAGGINS. (*aside*) Goodness gracious!

PARTRIDGE. Stay where you are! (*aside*) I must secure the exit. (*When turning his back, STAGGINS rushes to the centre door.*)

STAGGINS. It is high time to escape from this Othello! (*Quickly off C.*)

PARTRIDGE. The coward! This miserable rascal—he has escaped!

BERTHA and NANCY. (*hurrying from L. 2 E.*) What's the matter now?

PARTRIDGE. (*suddenly quiet and smiling*) Oh! nothing, my angel—I had a talk with this young man—he is indeed very nice—(*aside*) I must calm her. Perhaps then I may succeed in catching her.

BERTHA. Did you find out—

PARTRIDGE. That he is guiltless—yes!

BERTHA. And will you never again suspect me?

PARTRIDGE. Never! (*as if suddenly remembering something.*) Oh!

BERTHA. What is it?

PARTRIDGE. (*looking at his watch*) It is late—I shall miss my train—

BERTHA. Miss your train? Are you going away from me?

PARTRIDGE. Yes, darling! (*to NANCY*) Quick, get my satchel!

(*Exit NANCY, R. 2 E.*)

BERTHA. But tell me, please—

PARTRIDGE. I forgot to mention that I met this morning at my tailor's an old school-fellow whom I have not seen for twenty-five years. He lives in a comfortable villa in Nyack and I promised to spend a day or two with him. I think I shall be back again at noon to-morrow, my darling.

(*Enter NANCY R. 2 E.*)

NANCY. (*with satchel*) Here, sir, is your satchel!

BERTHA. (*handing him his hat*) Will you think of me, dear?

PARTRIDGE. Certainly! Your image will always be before my eyes—and your cane in my hand. Come, Nancy!

NANCY. (*aside to BERTHA*) That's a snare. Be careful!

PARTRIDGE. Have I got everything? (*aside*) Within half an hour I am back again—and like a tiger I shall jump amongst the guilty ones. (*aloud*) Good-bye, darling.

BERTHA. Good-bye, Raphael, until to-morrow.

(*PARTRIDGE kisses her forehead; NANCY follows him with satchel out C.*)

BERTHA. Should this journey really be pretended to ensare me? Does he thus reward my faith, my sincerity? With jealousy, distrust, and foul suspicion? Ah! If he treated his first wife like this, I understand how she could get square—

STAGGINS. (*entering C., with another cane*) Here I am again!

BERTHA (*turning toward him*) You here again?

STAGGINS. I saw your husband leaving the house—

BERTHA. What? Do you return on that account?

STAGGINS. Believe me, madame, there are important reasons for my venturing again into the lair of the tiger!

BERTHA. Sir?

STAGGINS. (*flourishing his cane*) But this time I am armed, too—though it is not on his account.

BERTHA. You merely came to see me?

STAGGINS. No; I told you before I had more important reasons. My cane—

BERTHA. Yes—I—

STAGGINS. Just now I got a letter from my widow—she returns to-night—and therefore please let me have my cane!

BERTHA. Your cane?

STAGGINS. Yes, my cane! My future happiness, the tranquillity of my mind, depend upon it! Please let me have it!

BERTHA. I haven't got it—I made my husband a present of it?

STAGGINS. Of my cane?

BERTHA. I was forced to do it! There was no other escape to keep your call a secret to him! Do not reproach me! I readily will pay for it!

STAGGINS. Pay for my cane? Millions couldn't compensate for the loss of it!

BERTHA. Didn't you tell me you had eighteen of these canes?

STAGGINS. Well—but now one is short, and if my widow discovers it, I am lost—and her money is lost to me, too! She is jealous, like—well, like your husband!

BERTHA. I am indeed very sorry—but at present I am unable to help you. Please leave me at once—in case my husband should return—

STAGGINS. I am very sorry, too—but without my cane I cannot leave you!

BERTHA. Remember, he is armed, and the tiger is excited—Othello pants for blood!

STAGGINS. (*frightened*) Blood? Excuse me, why didn't you tell me that before?

BERTHA. Hurry up, sir! Flee for your life!

(*Door c., opens, and NANCY appears, looking through the opening.*)

BERTHA. (*frightened*) Heavens!

NANCY. He's coming! He's coming!

STAGGINS. Who? The tiger? The Othello?

BERTHA. My husband! (*to NANCY*) Which way?

NANCY. I don't know! (*quickly closing the door.*)

BERTHA. Save yourself!

STAGGINS. If I only could—but where? Where?

(*Runs towards the door L. U. E., it is opened the same time, and he hides himself behind it, dropping cane. PARTRIDGE rushes in.*)

PARTRIDGE. I have forgotten to take my umbrella with me!

BERTHA. (*trembling*) Have you?

STAGGINS. (*aside, dodging through the door, L. U. E.*) Away! Away!

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) He is here! (*aloud, tenderly, but looking around suspiciously*) What is the matter with you, Bertha, you're trembling?

BERTHA. You frighten me so.

PARTRIDGE. Calm yourself, darling! I couldn't depart without my umbrella.

BERTHA. (*aside, after vainly looking around for STAGGINS*) Heaven be praised! He is gone!

PARTRIDGE. (*taking up the second cane, which STAGGINS dropped*) Ha! What have we here?

BERTHA. What is it?

PARTRIDGE. A bamboo cane!

BERTHA. (*frightened*) Heavens!

PARTRIDGE. (*diabolically*) Can you perhaps explain this veritable rain of canes, Mrs. Partridge?

BERTHA. Let me tell you—

PARTRIDGE. (*raving*) The wretch has hidden himself! (*Closes the centre door and draws the key out*) But he shall not escape! (*takes two pistols out of his pockets and walks into BERTHA'S room L. 2 E., holding the two canes under his arms*) Come, rascal, come!

BERTHA. How lucky! He escaped in time.

STAGGINS. (*looking through the door L. U. E., seeing that PARTRIDGE is not present, enters hastily, goes R., looks around and whispers to BERTHA, who has no idea of his presence*) I left my cane here.

BERTHA. Ah! Unhappy man! He has found it! He's searching for you! You are lost if he finds you!

STAGGINS. (*frightened*) Holy mustard! (*makes a movement as if to flee L. U. E.*)

BERTHA. (*listening*) It is too late! Quick, into this room! (*shoving him out R. 2 E.*)

PARTRIDGE. (*coming out of L. 2 E.*) He's not in here; maybe he's in my room! (*walks over to his room, the pistols in his hands and the canes under his arms*)

BERTHA. (*trying to keep him back*) Hear me, please—

PARTRIDGE. Step back, monster! Do not hinder my deed of vengeance!

BERTHA. For Heaven's sake—

PARTRIDGE. (*threatening*) Make way, faithless wife! (*Exit R. 2 E.*)

BERTHA. He must be off!

STAGGINS. (*has in the meantime sneaked out of PARTRIDGE'S room and hidden behind the curtains. He is minus his hat and carries his shoes in his hand*) Othello is let loose, but he shall not catch me!

BERTHA. Get away at once.

STAGGINS. I should like to, but whither? how?

PARTRIDGE. (*in his room, shouting*) Ha! Thunder and lightning!

BERTHA. He comes back. Quick, into the kitchen. (*Shoves him off, R. U. E.*)

PARTRIDGE. (*entering R. 2 E., STAGGINS' hat in hand.*) A gentleman's hat.

BERTHA. (*aside*) The careless fellow. (*Aloud*) It is your old one.

PARTRIDGE. (*trying to put it on his head*) It is much too small for me. (*Throws it on the floor and tramples on it.*) Take that, time-worn castor.

STAGGINS. (*appearing at R. U. E.*) My hat!

PARTRIDGE. Soon I will crush the bones of your owner, too, should he be hidden in the kitchen!

STAGGINS. (*coming in R. U. E., hides himself behind the easy-chair, his boots in hand*) Ha!

BERTHA. (*trying to keep PARTRIDGE back*) I implore you—

PARTRIDGE. Stand back, perfidious wife! (*runs off R. U. E.*)

BERTHA. (*to STAGGINS, who comes forward from behind the easy chair*) For Heaven's sake, save yourself, and don't come back again. (*Opens the door L. U. E.*)

STAGGINS. (*in his excitement, losing one of his shoes, runs off L. U. E.*) I am saved!

PARTRIDGE. (*entering R. U. E.*) Here, too, is nobody. (*Noticing STAGGINS' shoe, he puts it on the top of a cane.*) A shoe!

BERTHA. (*aside*) I'm dying.

PARTRIDGE. (*walking toward the window*) But where are you, deceiver? (*Looking around everywhere for STAGGINS, smashes the window-pane with a cane. The clatter of broken glass is heard. He opens the wardrobe, closes it again, then opens the door L. U. E.*) Ha! Should he—

BERTHA. (*aside*) Heavens!

PARTRIDGE. No; I came in here myself. Ha! (*Running to the fireplace, pushing his cane up the chimney.*) Come down, Lothario! Come down!

BERTHA. (*aside*) He is worse than Othello.

PARTRIDGE. And I didn't catch anything but one shoe,

one hat, and two canes. (*Packs the shoe in the hat and puts them under his arm, raving.*) Now to you, treacherous wife.

BERTHA. I don't want to defend myself; you are crazy.

PARTRIDGE. I wish it was only this, but I must have revenge—bloody revenge. I will take these trophies to your aunt.

BERTHA. Well, I go with you, sir. My aunt shall learn all.

PARTRIDGE. You remain here, madame, and early to-morrow I'll send you to a nunnery.

BERTHA. I don't want to be a nun.

PARTRIDGE. (*ironically*) I guess you will not like it. But I must have revenge. First on you, later on him. Bloody revenge. (*Exit c. in flat. He turns the key twice.*)

BERTHA. (*alone*) He's raving. Oh, his first wife was right.

STAGGINS. (*putting his head through the door L. U. E., with broken voice*) Is the tiger gone?

BERTHA. He is. What do you want now?

STAGGINS. (*entering with only one shoe on, staggering*) The house door is locked, and I can't get out.

BERTHA. Ah! The madman locked it when he returned. However, you cannot stay here. (*seeing his fainting condition*) What is the matter with you?

STAGGINS. My knees are shaking. (*Sitting down, R. F.*)

BERTHA. (*holding a smelling-bottle under his nose*) Take a good smell of this; it will reanimate you.

STAGGINS. Thanks! Thanks! (*Kissing her hand*) A thousand-fold thanks, madame!

BERTHA. What are you doing?

STAGGINS. Oh, let me—be convinced that my thankfulness is unbounded! But please let me have my canes, my shoe, my hat—and I hasten away—I must hurry. My widow came back! I saw her from the kitchen window! I must hurry to meet her!

BERTHA. Impossible! My husband has locked us in and gone on a journey.

STAGGINS. Locked us in? And then I must stay here?

BERTHA. In consequence of the foolish jealousy of my husband. It is too bad.

STAGGINS. (*aside*) How beautiful she is in her anger.

BERTHA. We must find means to get you out.

STAGGINS. I shall climb out of the window as soon as it grows dark.

BERTHA. Yes, do so. You are a man of honor.

STAGGINS. Very flattering to me. (*Kissing her hands.*)

BERTHA. But, sir—

STAGGINS. Do not be afraid. There is no danger for you with me. (*Crying aloud*) Ha!

BERTHA. Good gracious! What now?

STAGGINS. I know what it is. I am hungry. I have had no breakfast.

BERTHA. Come, take a glass of milk. (*Pouring a glassful for him.*)

STAGGINS. Ah! How kind you are.

BERTHA. Please drink.

STAGGINS. (*drinking*) You are so good—so kind. (*Again kissing her hands and returning the glass.*)

BERTHA. Your thankfulness is very ardent.

STAGGINS. I didn't know you at all this morning.

BERTHA. (*smiling*) And but for my husband's jealousy—

STAGGINS. I wouldn't have enjoyed this charming tête-à-tête. (*Noise outside, as of fumbling with key in lock of door, c. in flat.*)

BERTHA. Heavens! He's come back! We are lost!

STAGGINS. (*leaping up*) We are lost!

(NANCY, *entering c. in flat.*)

BERTHA and STAGGINS. Nancy!

NANCY. (*noticing STAGGINS, aside*) What! The young man all alone with my mistress!

BERTHA. My husband has locked us in.

NANCY. Locked you in? Together? (*aside*) He must be crazy. (*aloud*) A messenger boy delivered these two letters and the key to this door. (*Pointing to door in flat.*)

BERTHA. (*opens the letter*) From him!

STAGGINS. (*opens his letter*) From her!

BERTHA. (*reading*) "I have smashed the furniture in the room of your lover to pieces."

STAGGINS and NANCY. Oh!

STAGGINS. (*reading*) "Monster! I have the proof of your infidelity."

BERTHA. (*reading*) "I am locked up in the station-house. Please call at once and bail me out—that I may complete the work of my vengeance."

STAGGINS. "Do not think of my marrying you now! I'm longing for you to scratch out your eyes."

NANCY. Are both of them crazy?

BERTHA. With such a man it is absolutely impossible for me to live!

STAGGINS. Rather I'll be without her money than marry such a dragon!

BERTHA. He may stay in the station-house as long as he likes!

STAGGINS. She may wait for me until doomsday!

BERTHA. I will return at once to my aunt!

STAGGINS. All right! I go with you!

BERTHA. What?

STAGGINS. Permit me to chaperon you—you know you needn't be afraid of me!

BERTHA. It is true. You are a man of honor!

STAGGINS. But, I cannot travel without my hat and with only one shoe.

BERTHA. Step in there and you will find the necessary things in my husband's wardrobe!

STAGGINS. Be it so! Hat for hat!—shoe for shoe!

NANCY. I'll go fetch a cab! (*Exit c. in flat.*)

BERTHA. Do so—I will be ready in a few minutes. (*Exit L. 2 E.*)

STAGGINS. The affair is getting interesting! (*Exit R. 2 E.*)

(PARTRIDGE *slowly entering through the door, L. U. E.*)

PARTRIDGE. When I offered twenty-five dollars as indemnity for the broken furniture, they took it and let me go. As I have not a dime in my pockets, I want to get some money and—my wife, too! I'll take her myself to her aunt! There she may prove her guiltlessness, if she can! (*Peeping through the key-hole in BERTHA'S door, L. 2 E.*). What do I see? She's packing her trunks? What does that mean? (*Noise in PARTRIDGE'S room; a chair is overturned.*) What's that noise in my room? (*Peeping through the key-hole into his own room R. 2 E.*) What! my man!—the curly-head! The villain—he's putting my new shoes on! What's this for? Ha! an elopement!—Ah! (*hiding himself under the tiger-skin in front of the lounge*). I will spring between them like an avenging Nemesis.

(STAGGINS *entering R. 2 E. with hat and shoes much too large for him.*)

STAGGINS. I can hardly walk—these shoes are too large—at least No. 11½. I have done him wrong—considered him a tiger, and he is only an elephant.

(BERTHA *entering L. 2 E., bonnet and cape in hand.*)

BERTHA. I am ready, but let me tell you, sir, I do not want to raise the jealousy of my husband to a higher pitch

yet—and, therefore, must avoid every reason for suspicion. I shall travel without you to my aunt.

PARTRIDGE. (*surprised, looking up from under the tiger's head; aside*) What's this?

STAGGINS. You know well enough, madame, you don't need to be afraid of me! Though your husband, the Othello, has seized my canes, forgotten by mere chance, spoiled my hat—

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) And his shoe, too.

STAGGINS. Though he's pursuing me in blind madness, you know well enough, that there is no reason for his actions! It is but the highest esteem for you—

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) That's funny.

BERTHA. I know, sir! Let me thank you.

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) H'm! exceedingly virtuous people, these!

STAGGINS. Permit me, therefore, to accompany you as your protector. A young lady traveling alone is exposed to so many disagreeable things.

BERTHA. You are quite right.

PARTRIDGE. (*aside, with emotion*) An excellent young gentleman.

STAGGINS. You, madame, will not misapprehend me, like your husband. Please accept my proposal—it is made for his sake.

BERTHA. You are right—for his sake I accept your protection.

PARTRIDGE. (*aside*) This generosity—I can't stand it any longer.

(*Rising with the tiger-skin covering him, one of his pistols gets accidentally discharged.*)

BERTHA. Oh!

STAGGINS. (*touching himself from head to foot*) I'm killed! A corpse!

BERTHA. My husband!

STAGGINS. The tiger! Heaven help us! We are done for!

PARTRIDGE. No, my children! I overheard you and am perfectly cognizant of the wrongs I did you. (*throwing the skin off*) Come to my heart, my darling, close to my heart! All is well again.

BERTHA. (*in his embrace*) Yes! All is well again.

STAGGINS. All? What about my widow? She is lost to me!

PARTRIDGE. (*to BERTHA*) We shall refund him his widow, shall we not, Betsy?

BERTHA. If you like to—

PARTRIDGE. (*to STAGGINS*) My house is henceforth yours—

BERTHA. But, dearest—

PARTRIDGE. Hush! I want it so. (*aside to STAGGINS*) You will tell me when an obtrusive fellow should approach her.

STAGGINS. (*aside to PARTRIDGE*) I shall watch her—as I would my own wife.

PARTRIDGE. I trust in you—I may be quiet—

STAGGINS. (*aside*) Not yet—but it will come.

BERTHA. (*to PARTRIDGE*) And you will promise me to cease your jealousy?

PARTRIDGE. I'll throw it overboard.

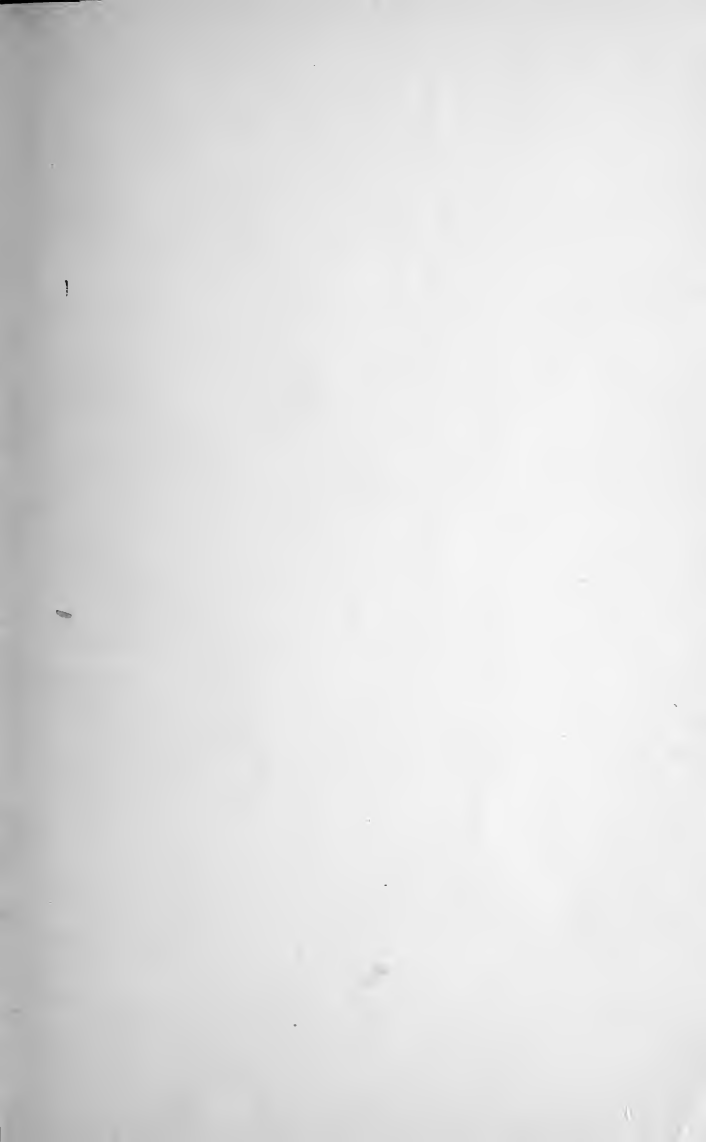
BERTHA. (*smiling and shaking her finger at him*) Keep your words and don't again be—

PARTRIDGE. }

STAGGINS. } A Modern Othello.

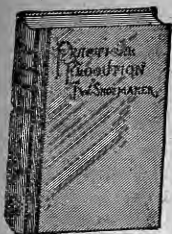
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